

The History of
English Poetry

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An Epitome of English History

Since the Norman Conquest

In Rhyme

Henry Picton

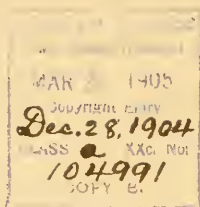


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*Not to thee, alas!
To the sweet memories of thy friendship.*



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By Henry Pleasants

AN EPITOME IN RHYME,
of English History Since the Norman
Conquest.

1. To tell of England's story
 In words that catch the ears;
 Epitomizing briefly
 Events of many years :
2. From Normandy's great conquest
 Until the present time,
 Declares the modest object
 Of this succeeding rhyme.
3. If this impress the outline
 Of England's great career,
 That so, in fuller detail,
 Its study be less drear :
4. Fulfilled then is the object
 For which the work is done,
 And pleasure, if not glory,
 At least is fairly won.



- 1066-1087. 5. First came the Norman William,
 The Conqueror by name,
Oct. 14, 1066. For Senlac hill at Hastings
 Saw Saxon Harold slain.

6. He introduced the system
Of ancient feudal lords,
Creating English tenures
As if men were his wards.
7. He built enormous castles
Throughout the land he won,
And filled them with his soldiers,
To keep the conquered down.
8. Yet he enforced stern justice
With aid of Norman laws,
And proved himself a statesman
In spite of many wars.
- 1087-1100. 9. Then came his third son, William,
Whom people called "The Red;"
A hunter more than statesman,
A vicious life he led.
- 1100-1135. 10. The Conqu'ror's son, named Henry,
Came next to rule the land:
And ruled it like his father,
With strong and mighty hand.
11. He granted many charters
Securing people rights,
And chose his queen from England,
To aid him in his fights.
12. And when the Norman nobles
Were met by Henry's men,
Sept. 28, 1106. The victory of Tenchebrai
Gave England heart again.

- 1135-1154. 13. His nephew, Stephen, followed,
By whom the land was curs'd;
1154-1189. And then a second Henry,
The grandson of the first.
14. He first established Juries,
And made the people heard
When they were treated harshly
At haughty baron's word.
15. 'Twas in this reign, at Oxford,
The earliest steps were made
To found that mighty college,
Where Truth is ne'er afraid.
16. Yet Henry caused the murder
Of Becket of renown,
Dec. 29, 1170. Within the grand cathedral
At Canterbury town.
- 1189-1199. 17. Next Lion-hearted Richard,
Who fought the third crusade,
And proved his mighty valor
For those who needed aid.
- 1199-1216. 18. And after Cœur de Lion,
His evil brother John,
Who signed the Magna Charta
June 15, 1215. As barons drove him on.
19. This proved the famous bulwark
Of English people's might,
Creating limitations
On every sovereign's right.

- 1216-1272. 20. King Henry third succeeded,
 On whom the barons warred,
 May 24, 1264. Led on by Simon Montfort,
 A great and mighty lord.
- 1272-1307. 21. The first of all the Edwards
 Then conquered Welsh and Scots:
 1296. He carried off the sacred stone,
 And re-arranged the courts:
22. A Parliament he summoned
 With Commoners alive;
 And paid the members sitting
 1295. In twelve and ninety-five.
- 1307-1327. 23. His son's, was second Edward's
 Humiliating term,
 Who lost the hold on Scotland
 June 24, 1314. At famous Bannockburn.
- 1327-1377. 24. But Edward third won vict'ries
 O'er Scotland and in France;
 Aug. 26, 1346. He fought the famous Crecy,
 With powder for a lance:
- Aug. 4, 1347. 25. He took the city Calais,
 Sept. 19, 1356. And won at Poitiers, too:
 1340-1400. With this time, both great Chaucer
 1325-1384. And Wycliffe had to do.
- 1377-1399. 26. His grandson, second Richard,
 Tried then to rule a time;
 But people made him prisoner
 Sept. 29, 1399. In thirteen ninety-nine.

- 1330-1376. 27. He was the son of Edward,
 The "Black Prince" known to fame:
 Whose mighty deeds of valor
 Immortalized his name.
28. Now, too, were great uprisings
 Of Wat the Tyler's men,
 Proclaiming all men equal
 1381. In thirteen eighty-one.
- 1399-1413. 29. Then Henry fourth succeeded
 At Parliament's command,
 1407. And Commons won the power
 To tax throughout the land.
30. But he suppressed the Lollards,
 An act unjustly done,
 And caused their persecution
 1401. In fourteen hundred one.
- 1413-1422. 31. The fifth one of the Henrys
 Was too a mighty king;
 Oct. 25, 1415. At Agincourt he proved it,
 And made the nation ring.
32. He gave up to the Commons
 The right, kings exercised,
 1414. To change the bills brought to them,
 To have them supervised.
- 1422-1461. 33. But Henry sixth was feeble,
 And Joan, the Maid of Arc,
 1429-1431. Gained many famous vict'ries,
 And made a wondrous mark.

- 1461-1483. 34. King Edward fourth succeeded,
1455-1485. With "Roses' wars" astir
Between the rival houses
Of York and Lancaster.
1476. 35. 'Twas now, amid the contests,
The printing press appeared,
And won more lasting power
Than knight or monarch feared.
1483. 36. Then Edward fifth preceded
1483-1485. His uncle Richard third,
Who caused him to be murdered,
And all the nation stirred.
- Aug. 22, 1485. 37. But on the field of Bosworth
1485-1509. Avengers were alive;
And seventh Henry followed
In fourteen eighty-five.
38. Thus closed mediæval hist'ry,
And rival claims unite
To make the people mighty
And loyal to the right.
39. And now the Middle classes,
Developing at length,
Vied with the haughty nobles
In showing forth their strength;
- April 21, 1509. 40. And when the first of Tudors
Was laid to rest in peace,
Within his splendid chapel
Whose glories never cease,

- 1509-1547. 41. His son, the eighth of Henrys,
 Began th' eventful years
 Which severed Popes from England,
 Despite the people's fears.
- 1515-1529. 42. He first encouraged Wolsey,
 The cardinal from the Pope;
 1530-1540. And then, through Thomas Cromwell
 On whom was built great hope,
- 1536-1539. 43. Suppressed all monasteries
 Throughout the entire land,
 And made the Church of England
 Dependent on his hand.
- 1547-1553. 44. The sixth of Edwards followed,
 And Protestants grew strong,
 1548-1552. Establishing a prayer book
 With liturgy and song.
45. Although a youthful sovereign
 And full of bigot zeal,
 He tried to do his duty
 And sought the people's weal.
46. He favored education
 Among the Middle class,
 And founded schools in London
 Intended for the mass.
- 1553-1558. 47. Then on the death of Edward,
 Came Mary, linked with Spain,
 To force her alien doctrines
 And carry out the same.

48. Yet, though the blood of martyrs
 Flowed freely through the land,
 The Protestants stood bravely,
 Despite the Queen's command ;
- Nov. 17, 1558. 49. And when the death of Mary
 1558-1603. Relieved the people's fears,
 Elizabeth, her sister,
 Began her glorious years.
1588. 50. She crushed Spain's great Armada,
 She smiled at all her foes,
 She held the nation steady
 From all religious woes.
51. Though she was vain and selfish
 And cruel and untrue,
 Almighty God controlled her
 With his great ends in view.
52. With her, the English Navy
 Grew "Mistress of the Seas,"
 And spread her mighty power
 Wherever she might please.
53. In this reign, too, were granted
 Dec. 31, 1599. Those chartered Indian rights,
 Whence grew a mighty nation,
 Though after many fights.
54. Nor was Old England's progress
 In Art and Letters less,
 Till world-wide was the influence
 Of the great and proud Queen Bess.

- 1564-1623. 55. 'Twas then the mighty Shakespeare
Produced his glorious plays;
And Spenser, Bacon, Raleigh,
Were famous in their ways.
- 1603-1625. 56. King James the first then followed:
With him the Scottish crown
United with the English—
United for renown.
1611. 57. He was the first of Stuarts,
A wise and learned fool;
But gave to us our Bible,
Our blest and sacred rule.
- 1625-1649. 58. Then Charles the first succeeded:
A sad and troubled term
Of contests with the Commons,
Who held their privilege firm.
59. He sought to raise the monarch
Above the people's right,
And Commoners opposed him
With sturdy sullen might.
60. Now came the time of Hampden,
Of Pym and Cromwell too:
When Independents grasped at
The Church of England's due.
- Jan. 30, 1649. 61. Then mortal contests followed,
And Charles soon lost his head:
Becoming "Charles the Martyr,"
To those whose cause he led.

- 1649-1660. 62. A Commonwealth then followed,
And Cromwell rose to fame:
1653-1658. Known as "The Lord Protector,"
A king, save in the name.
63. Although a stern usurper,
He sought the people's good,
And let them hold such powers
As he thought best they should.
- 1660-1685. 64. Him, second Charles succeeded:
The "Merry Monarch" called;
1665-1666. Though plague and fire ravaged
And all the land appalled.
1679. 65. The law of "Habeas corpus"
Was in this reign defined;
And Whigs or Tories flourished
As people felt inclined.
- 1670-1678. 66. And he, the English sovereign
Through whom the king of France
Controlled important treaties,
To make his power advance.
- 1685-1688. 67. Charles' brother James soon followed:
A foolish, headstrong king,
An artful, tactless bigot,
Whence all his troubles spring.
1673. 68. He sought by "dispensation,"
To disregard the law;
And set aside the "test act"
Passed in the reign before.

69. The people, apprehensive
Lest Rome should rule at last,
June 30, 1688. Asked William, Prince of Orange,
To undertake the task;
70. And with his good wife, Mary,
A daughter of the king,
As Protestants to govern
In each and every thing.
71. He was the one selected
Their rights to vindicate,
Because defending Holland
From its impending fate:
72. When France, the Romish nation,
'Gainst Protestants did strive;
And Huguenots were murdered
1685. In sixteen eighty-five.
73. And, since he was the husband
Of James' eldest child,
'Twas thought this strange succession
Could be more reconciled.
74. Prince William, too, was willing
The task to undertake,
And thus as his great ally
The English people make.
75. But when King James came forward
To try defend his throne,
His soldiers all deserted
And left the king alone.

76. In silence and in terror,
 Dec. 23, 1688. King James then stole away
 To ask the aid of Louis
 In the impending fray.
- 1689-1694. 77. King William then and Mary,
 The Silent and the Good,
 April 11, 1689. Assumed the royal sceptre
 As they had said they would;
1689. 78. And Parliament assembling,
 Declared it should be law,
 That Romish kings should never
 Rule as they did before:
1694. 79. That on the death of Mary.
 1694-1702. The king should rule alone;
 And Anne, her sister, follow,
 1702-1714. Whose virtues soon were known.
80. This, was the Revolution
 1688. Of sixteen eighty-eight:
 Without a drop of bloodshed
 It made the people great.
81. It crushed for aye the folly
 Of rights divine of kings;
 Establishing forever
 The rights whence Freedom springs.
82. And now, with the new sovereigns,
 Were passed some worthy laws;
 1689. One, granted toleration
 To most sects showing cause.

1696. 83. Another gave new coinage,
 And coins debased recalled;
 This proved the best for people,
 Though many were appalled.
1692. 84. 'Twas now, to raise the money
 To wage the foreign wars,
 The great debt of the nation
 Had its initial cause.
1694. 85. And soon the Bank of England
 Was formed to undertake
 Finances of the nation,
 In great affairs of state.
1701. 86. Now, too, the terms of judges
 Were made to last for life,
 And Justice elevated
 Above a sovereign's strife.
1693. 87. And now, the king selected
 His ministers alone
 Within the side triumphant,
 As nearest to the throne.
- 1702-1713.
 1714-1830. 88. The rest of England's story
 Is much too long for rhyme:
 To tell of Marl'ro's vict'ries:
 Of all four Georges' time:
89. How was the peace of Europe
 Preserved by bloody wars:
 May 1, 1707. The final act of union,
 Cementing Scottish shores:

90. Of Wolfe's Canadian triumph
 In sev'nteen fifty-nine:
 Sept. 12, 1759. America's independence:
 July 4, 1776. Napoleon's meteor shine:
 1797-1815.
91. Of William Pitt, the statesman,
 And William Pitt, his son:
 1708-1778. Of great reform bill contests,
 1739-1806. Where Right has always won:
 1832-1867
 1884.
92. How 'twas the nation purchased
 All slaves throughout the land,
 Aug. 31, 1834. And set them free forever
 By Royal mandate's wand:
93. How chartered rights in India,
 Developing with Clive,
 Nov. 1, 1858. Produced a mighty empire
 Whence other nations thrive:
94. How William fourth succeeded
 His brother George the last;
 1830-1837. And on his niece Victoria
 The crown at length was cast:
 June 20, 1837.
95. How she became the Empress
 Of India's coral strand;
 1877. And longer than all sovereigns
 She ruled throughout the land.
 1837-1901.
96. And last, came Albert Edward,
 The old Queen's eldest son,
 On whom the crown descended
 In nineteen hundred one.
 Jan. 22, 1901.

97. All these events important,
 So briefly touched on here,
Attest the influence mighty—
 Extensive with the sphere—
98. Which England has exerted
 To aid the cause of Right ;
And show God's gracious guidance
 In giving her such might.
99. Then whether coming centuries
 Shall show her march alone,
Or with her English brothers
 Within the western zone,
100. May God's almighty guidance
 Go with her in her course,
And may she e'er acknowledge
 Her strength that mighty source.

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